

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 AID-05 IGA-02

A-01 OPR-02 OC-05 CCO-00 OMB-01 FBO-02 CU-02 SY-05

SS-15 NSC-05 SP-02 L-03 PRS-01 PA-01 DODE-00 ABF-01

FS-01 PC-01 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 /069 W

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O R 051822Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8107

INFO USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 0198

USIA FOR IAA

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: AFSP, PFOR, DM, US

SUBJ: BENIN GOVT GIVES USG NOTICE TO EVACUATE ITS CHANCERY

AND OTHER NEARBY BUILDINGS IN COTONOU

1. THIS AFTERNOON WE RECEIVED A "CONFIDENTIAL" NOTE FROM BENIN FORNMINISTRY WHICH READS AS FOLLOWS: (SUBSTANTIVE PORTION ONLY)"...(THE MINISTRY) HAS THE HONOR TO BRING TO THE EMBASSY'S ATTENTION THAT, FOR REASONS OF CONVENIENCE AND WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF REMODELING THE ZONE IN WHICH THE EMBASSY CHANCERY IS LOCATED, THE GOVT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN REQUESTS IT TO PROCEED TO RENT OTHER BUILDINGS IN ORDER TO MAKE THE PRESENT ONES AVAILABLE (TO THE BENIN GOVT) BY OCT 26, 1976."

2. COMMENT: IT APPEARS THAT THE BENIN GOVT NOW PLANS TO EX-PROPRIATE (OR CONFISCATE) THE CHANCERY AND OTHER BUILDINGS IN THE CHANCERY COMPLEX FROM THEIR OWNER, FORMER PRESIDENT GENERAL SOGLO, WHO INCIDENTALLY TAKES NO PART IN POLITICS AND HAS NEVER PUBLICLY CRITICIZED THE KEREKOU GOVT. (EMBASSY COMPLEX CONSISTS OF CHANCERY, ADJACENT WAREHOUSE, GARAGE, CULTURAL CENTER AND PAO'S HOUSE).

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3. WE KNOW THAT IN PAST FEW MONTHS GOVT AGENTS HAVE BEEN ASKING QUESTIONS THROUGHOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD RE OCCUPANTS AND USES OF THE VARIOUS HOUSES.

4. THE DATE OCT 26 IS SIGNIFICANT. IT WILL BE THE FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MILITARY COUP THAT BROUGHT THE KEREKOU REGIME TO POWER.

5. SINCE THE CHANCERY IS ONLY ONE BLOCK FROM CAMP GUEZO, WHICH IS COTONOU'S MILITARY BASE, WE SUSPECT THAT THE REGIME'S MASTER PLAN IS TO ENLARGE THE PERIMETER OF THAT BASE, TAKE OVER THE NICE HOUSES IN THIS ZONE AS FIRST-CLASS ACCOMMODATIONS OF MINISTERS, OTHER MILITARY OFFICERS AND PARTY OFFICIALS, AS WELL AS ANY OTHER FACILITIES THAT CAN BE ACQUIRED. CAMP GUEZO ALREADY ACCOMMODATES THE TROOPS RESIDENT IN COTONOU, THE ARMORY, EQUIPMENT STAGING ARSUS, A PRISON AND TORTURE FACILITIES. THE WHOLE NEW COMPLEX WOULD PROBABLY BECOME A MILITARY REDOUBT WHERE REGIME LEADERS CAN LIVE AND WORK WITHOUT FEAR OF INSURRECTION OR ASSASSINATION.

6. IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR THIS EMBASSY TO MOVE TO ANOTHER LOCATION ON EIGHT MONTHS' NOTICE AND MAINTAIN REASONABLE EFFECTIVENESS. WE KNOW OF NO OTHER BUILDING OR BUILDINGS IN COTONOU CAPABLE OF SUITABLY HOUSING CHANCERY AND CULTURAL CENTER. SATISFACTORY COMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES WOULD BE LACKING. EXPENSE OF SHIFTING OF COURSE WOULD BE VERY CONSIDERABLE.

7. IT WOULD PROBABLY TAKE MORE THAN A YEAR TO ERECT A NEW CHANCERY, ONCE FUNDS WERE AVAILABLE. IN VIEW OF THE ESTABLISHED IRRESPONSIBILITY OF THE MARXIST-LENINIST REGIME THAT RULES BENIN, AND ITS DECLARED OBJECTIVE OF COMPLETELY WIPING OUT THE OLD PROPRTIED CLASS (THERE IS NO RULE OF LAW; ANY BUILDING CAN BE TAKEN OVER AT ANY TIME), WE WOULD URGE THE DEPT NOT TO CONSIDER ANY SOLUTION OTHER THAN CONSTRUCTION AND OUTRIGHT USG OWNERSHIP OF ITS OWN BUILDINGS.

8. ABOVE-DESCRIBED ACTION OF THE BENIN GOVT, AND THE SHORT NOTICE GIVEN, SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BY ALL PANELS NOW ENGAGED IN INTENSIVE REVIEWS OF AMERICAN RELATIONSHIPS WITH
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THE PRB.

9. BENIN GOVT HAS ALSO CONFISCATED AMB'S RESIDENCE (LEASED)

AND IS DEMANDING RENT (SEPTTEL FOLLOWS).

10. WE INTEND TO TAKE THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS DURING NEXT FEW DAYS:

A. DISCUSS MATTER WITH OUR LANDLORD GEN SOGLO.

B. REQUEST FOREIGN MINISTRY TO PROVIDE MORE INFO, INCLUDING EXPLANATION OF SHORT NOTICE. WE WILL ASK THEM WHAT THEY THINK WE ARE TO DO.

C. SEEK TO IDENTIFY OTHER FACILITIES THAT COULD BE OCCUPIED, AT LEAST ON A TEMPORARY BASIS.

D. MAKE INQUIRIES TO DETERMINE WHETHER OTHER PROPERTIES IN THE ZONE ARE BEING TAKEN OVER BY THE BENIN GOVT.

E. SUSPEND CHANCERY RENOVATION NOW IN PROGRESS (CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNICATIONS CENTER AND OTHER IMPROVEMENTS IN SECURITY COSTING \$70,000).

11. REQUESTED ACTION: WOULD APPRECIATE INSTRUCTIONS SOONEST.
ENGLE

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NNN

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